On the Path of the Beloved

Episode 5 : The Beginning of the Revelation

In the name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful. Peace and blessings be upon His Prophet Muhammad.

Today's episode consists of one part only: the beginning of the revelation.

Forty years of preparation were to prepare for 23 years of revelation, because this is the last divine message, the message to last until the end of time. It also shows that great projects need meticulous and gradual preparation and development. By then, the Prophet had acquired experience in all fields: social, financial, political, marital and so on. The world, the Arabian Peninsula and Makkah were also ready.

The prophet was now 38 years of age. There were two years left till revelation, but the last two years were an introduction or prelude (and not preparation) to the meeting of Jibril *(AS)* (Gabriel). The prophet had to start feeling that something extraordinary was about to happen. It was a grace from Allah, for He says in the Qur'an what can be translated as, "**If We had sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, indeed you would have seen it submissive, sundered apart out of apprehension of Allah; and those similitudes We strike for mankind, that possibly they would meditate." (TMQ, 59:21).[1]**

The prelude was gradual over two years or more, and then intense for six months. The prophet would be walking in the street and hear the trees greeting him, "peace be upon you messenger of Allah." He would turn back to look and find no one.

The Prophet *(SAWS)* said, "I know a stone in Makkah that used to salute me before I received the revelation, I still know it now."[2]

The prophet also started having good dreams, that he related to his wife and four daughters after waking, only to see them come true during the day. Narrated by Aisha (The mother of the faithful believers): "The commencement of the Divine Inspiration to Allah's Prophet was in the form of good dreams which came true like bright day light."[3]

They were not fantastic events but simple things, like expecting a visit from Khadijah's uncle and knowing the details of what would happen when he came. Narrated By Abu Huraira: Allah's Prophet said, "The (good) dream of a faithful believer is a part of the forty-six parts of prophetism."[4] Any man who sees a good dream that comes true has one part of 46 parts of prophetism. The Prophet's preaching lasted 23 years and the duration of these good dreams was six months. If we divide 23 by 6 the result is 1 over 46!

Most importantly, in the last period before the revelation, the Prophet started to love seclusion. We can see here how after years of work and endeavor, Allah wants the Prophet to develop his spiritual beliefs, thus striking a balance between the material world and the spiritual realm. The Prophet contemplated life and creation and deeper meanings of existence. No man or woman have found guidance until the love of being closer to Allah was bestowed upon them. Listen to this ayah in which Allah says what can be translated as, **"…But Allah has made you love belief, and adorned it (i.e., made it attractive) in your hearts, and He has made disbelief, and (evident) immorality, and all-stubborn disobedience hateful to you. Those are they who are the right- minded." (TMQ, 49:7).**

We can sense the greatness of the meaning of **"adorned it in your hearts"** in Ramadan. The very same night Ramadan starts, all of us rejoice and look forward to worshiping Allah. It is no wonder that the Hadith says, "Abdullah bin-Amr bin-Al-As reported that he heard Allah's Messenger *(SAWS)* as saying, 'Verily, the hearts of all the sons of Adam are between the two fingers, out of the fingers of the Compassionate Lord, as one heart. He turns that to any (direction) He likes. Then Allah's Messenger *(SAWS)* said, 'O Allah, the Turner of the hearts, turn our hearts to Thine obedience.'"[5]

Allah *(SWT)* constantly **"adorned it in your hearts".** When you feel like praying two *Rak'aa* (one unit of prayer) or think of going to *umra* (minor pilgrimage) then you get distracted by life; in that case Allah sent you the message but you chose not to listen.

I know a story of a young man whose mother was diabetic. A friend of mine, who was a doctor, used to visit her at her home to check on her health. Once, after visiting her, she told him that it was getting late and that her son would drop him home. On the way, the son was talking to him and being very cynical about religion (which is very uncommon in our countries). He said I would like to go to hell to be with the cool crowds etc. My friend got very upset, and asked him politely to drop him where they were. Time passed and my friend went to Saudi Arabia then came back. Two years later, he received a call from the boy's mother asking him to come and check on her. When he finished, she offered him a ride home with her son, the man declined firmly. She insisted that as soon as he finishes praying *isha* (evening prayer) in the mosque he would drive him home. Upon hearing this, my friend was stupefied and accepted.

On their way, he asked the young man about this change. He replied, "I started working in a tourism agency, the trips were mainly to Europe at the beginning. Then *umra* travelers increased, so I started going to Makkah. I used to laugh at people in their pilgrimage dress and never thought of doing *umra* with them. One time, it was the first of Shaaban, the time of washing the Ka'ba. I thought to myself, I have to go and watch this, I cannot be coming here and not see the Ka'ba, once at least. As I stood there, watching, a sheikh took my hand and told me, "come I will let you in with me." I suddenly found myself inside the Ka'ba, and found myself weeping. I was never the same person after that." Do you see how Allah guides people without them even knowing? Allah planted the love of Ramadan in our hearts. We should, therefore, work hard and not miss this opportunity. Remember our Motto, " I will worship Allah *(SWT)*, like I have never done before".

Allah made the Prophet love seclusion, so he started to look for a place where he could contemplate peacefully. He wanted a place with a warm feel, overlooking the Ka'ba. Indeed the cave really looked like a warm, embracing place.

He looked at the mountains. He must have looked hard until he found the cave of Hira' which was 3 miles away from the Ka'ba. He made the effort because Allah adorned in his heart the love of faith. Climbing the mountain takes about an hour and a half. When you reach the summit you are sweating and tired. The place, by night, is desolate. Imagine being in the heart of a mountain, in the heart of a cave at two o'clock in the morning on a night with no moonlight; that is when he was visited by Jibril *(AS)* (Gabriel). The prophet used to spend many days there, some say 10 days.

He used to spend 10 days doing one thing only: reflecting.

Aisha *(RA)* said, "He used to go in seclusion into the cave of Hira where he used to worship (Allah alone)."[6] We must not forget that at the time there were no prayers because he had not become a Prophet yet, so he was reflecting the way Ibrahim *(AS)* (Abraham) did. Allah says what can be translated as, **"And thus We show Ibrahîm (Abraham) the dominion of the heavens and the earth that he may be of the ones of constant certitude." (TMQ, 6:75).**

Contemplation leads to certitude. He reflected on the day and night, the heaven and the earth, the stars, the power of Allah and His sovereignty over His universe.

Amer Ibn-Abd-Kays, one of the *tabe'een* (disciple of the companions of the Prophet), said that he heard ten of the companions of the Prophet say that the light of Islam is contemplation. Um-Addarda' was asked what form of worship Abu-Addarda', who was one the greatest companions of the Prophet, used to practice the most. She said "reflecting". Al-Hasan Al-Basry used to say, "one hour of contemplation is better than a year of *Qiyam* (vigil night prayer)".

Large companies nowadays organize a day off work to take their employees to hotels in remote places to reflect on a new world. Their motive is to make more money. Ask yourselves; when was the last time you reflected on the greatness of Allah, on your future, on your goals in life?

Imagine the Prophet in the cave of Hira, imagine what he used to do there. At times, he would look at the sky and contemplate the universe. At other times, he would look at the Ka'ba and the 300 statues over it; these could not be right. He would also reflect on his situation, losing his parents at an early age, what was the wisdom in that? He reflected on the matters of life and death, on the 38 years of his life and what his purpose in life was. This was the final prelude to the revelation; the cave of Hira.

If only we can promise ourselves to allocate one hour, not in our day but our week, to reflect. Try to practice it while walking and you will see the difference. Try to write it down. Keep asking yourselves, "why am I here?" This question haunted the Prophet for 3 years. Insist on asking it and Allah will guide you. He will open a door for you. The most essential thing is that you persist. Do not give up from the first attempt, and you will find your call in life. Our lives

are but one arrow, and we are bound to aim and shoot it, so beware of gambling with the one shot you have.

Khadijah used to visit the Prophet, and spend two or three days with him in the cave.

She approved of what her husband was doing and supported him, and most importantly, and this is a word of advice to all women, never be in a totally different world from your husband's. The gap between you would increase, and you would find yourselves talking different languages, and that might lead to divorce.

Khadijah *(RA)* was a great wife. She was a wise and smart woman and would not leave her husband all this period alone. On the other hand, she did not impose on him during the whole period. She showed him her approval of his choice, her care through her visits, and her trust in him by not imposing on him. Narrated by Ali *(RA):* The Prophet said, "The best of the world's women is Mary (at her lifetime), and the best of the world's women is Khadijah (at her lifetime)."[7]

A woman should stay with her husband, and a husband should involve his wife in his life so that they do not grow apart.

However, do not think that this means that you can go and isolate yourselves in a cave! None of the companions did that. It was a phase that passed. In fact the prophet said, narrated by Abdullah Bin-Omar, "The believer who associates with people and bears their harm is rewarded far more generously than the believer who does not associate with people and does not put up with their harm."[8]

Neither did the Prophet nor the companions isolate themselves in that manner after Islam. Even *I'tikaf* (in the last ten days of Ramadan) has to be done in the Mosque amongst people. Our religion is one of coexistence and harmony with other.

Khadijah endured greatly in these visits. When she married the Prophet, she was forty years of age. Fifteen years had past, she was now fifty-five. It is amazing how a fifty-five year old woman can climb a mountain to join her husband in the cave, only to sit and reflect with him. She was a great women and one of the greatest graces that Allah bestowed on the Prophet. He was told to "give Khadijah the good tidings that she will have a palace made of *Qasab* (pearls) in paradise and there will be neither noise nor any trouble in it."[9] *Qasab* is a type of hollow pearl that resembles the cave, because the reward is of the nature of the deed.

The prophet is at a point in his life where he has been reflecting for three years and where he feels he wants to contribute to society. Then, the turning point took place. Let us look at this film of the cave and imagine the embrace between the Prophet *(SAWS)* and Jibril *(AS)*.

Here is where Islam started. I am amazed how Prophet Muhammad *(SAWS)* managed to reach this place. I am surrounded by three large rocks that look like an embrace that contains me within it.

Here came the first revelation. Allah *(SWT)* says what can be translated as, **"Surely We sent it down on the Night of Determination; And what makes you realize what the Night of Determination is? The Night of Determination is more charitable (i.e., better) than a thousand months." (TMQ, 97:1-3).**

Let me ask you something: where would you prefer the revelation to begin, in a luxurious palace, or in this simple place? This is another lesson Allah *(SWT)* teaches us; that Islam is not founded on luxury but rather on the power of the idea, the mission itself. Besides, no matter how simple the place is, what really counts is *Ikhlas* (Truthfulness).

This place witnessed the first communication between the Heavens and the Earth; a communication that lasted for 23 years. In this place, the Heavens embraced the Earth; the light of the Heavens met with the light of the earth. No matter how hard it is to reach for this place, yet Allah *(SWT)*, out of the rest of the world, chose this simple place for Islam to commence.

= Back to the studio =

You should perceive the magnificence of the communication between the Heavens and the Earth. Anas *(RA)* reported that after the death of Allah's Messenger *(SAWS)* Abu-Bakr said to Omar, “Let us visit Umm-Ayman as Allah's Messenger *(SAWS)* used to visit her. As we came to her, she wept. They (Abu-Bakr and Omar) said to her, “What makes you weep? What is in store (in the next world) for Allah's Messenger *(SAWS)* is better than (this worldly life). She said, “I weep not because I am ignorant of the fact that what is in store for Allah's Messenger *(SAWS)* (in the next world) is better than (this world), but I weep because the revelation which came from the Heaven has ceased to come. This moved both of them to tears and they began to weep along with her." [10] Can you see? Um Ayman, that simple woman, perceived the glory of the revelation coming down to the Earth.

Aisha *(RA)* narrated, "The angel came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet replied, “I do not know how to read.” The Prophet added, “The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read and I replied, “I do not know how to read.” Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time until I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read but again I replied, I do not know how to read (or what shall I read)?” Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said what can be translated as, **"Read: In the Name of your Lord Who created, Created man from clots. Read: And your Lord is The Most Honorable, Who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know." (TMQ, 96:1-5).** Then Allah's Apostle returned with the Inspiration and with his heart beating severely.” [11]

Now let us ponder upon the significance of that embrace. First, it is a symbol of mercy, love and peace. This is exactly the mission of Islam, which rejects all kinds of violence, oppression or unjust. Secondly, it was to prove to the Prophet that he was not dreaming, but rather he was awake; notice that Prophet Muhammad *(SAWS)* spent six months, prior to the revelation, dreaming of good dreams that came true, like bright day light. Thirdly, the beginning of the revelation was meant to be powerful to indicate the seriousness of Islam's mission.

Here I am telling you, we are in a grave situation; our countries are falling, so we should revive them again. The revelation commenced in Ramadan, so seize the opportunity and make this Ramadan your new commencement too.

One more thing to ponder upon is the beginning itself: "*Iqra"* (recite). Why did the mission of Islam started that way, although Prophet Muhammad *(SAWS)* himself was illiterate?

It indicates that the era of miracles is over. A new era of knowledge, science and planning has started by Muhammad *(SAWS).* Nevertheless, 60% of our nation is illiterate. People are still waiting for a miracle that would turn their lives to the better. They cannot realize that that miracle would never happen unless they became true Muslims.

Such a start, with *Iqra'*, leaves no doubt about the truth of Islam. Islam is applicable to all ages, and this is the age of knowledge. Allah (*SWT)* says what can be translated as, **"Read: In the Name of your Lord Who created, Created man from clots. Read: And your Lord is The Most Honorable, Who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know." (TMQ, 96:1-5).** He mentioned knowledge along with its tools six times in just five *ayahs*. Miracles are over. If we are to take this mission seriously, we would be the miracle.

Some people are embarrassed that Prophet Muhammad was illiterate. To the contrary, they should know that this is a miracle in itself. The illiterate man educated the whole world. He left a great heritage of knowledge that is still being explored until this very day.

After he met with Jibril *(AS)*, he was very frightened. It indicates that he was not going after the prophecy. On the other hand, there was another man called Abu-Amer who knew through his readings in the scriptures of the approach of the seal of the prophets. He wished he would be that prophet. He started preparing himself, so that people then called him "The monk". When he knew that the revelation came upon Muhammad *(SAWS)*, he showed great enmity to him. He was the one who dug a hole for Prophet Muhammad *(SAWS)* in the Battle of Uhud to fall in it. This is a crucial point to realize, that we should not care about beautifying the external impression at the expense of the what is inside us. Only then will Allah *(SWT)* help and guide us.

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[1] TMQ=Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an. This translation is for the realized meaning, so far, of the stated (Surah:Ayah) of the Qur'an. Reading the translated meaning of the Qur'an can never replace reading it in Arabic, the language in which it was revealed.

[2] Sahih Muslim, narrated by Jaber Bin-Samra.

[3] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 1, revelation.

[4] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 87, interpretation of dreams.

[5] Sahih Muslim, Book 33, Destiny

[6] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 1, revelation

[7] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 5, book 58

[8] Sahih Al-Alabani, Sahih Ibn-Majah

[9] Sahih Bukhari, volume 3, book 27

[10] An authentic hadith in Sahih Muslim, Book 031, Number 6009.

[11] An authentic hadith in Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 1, Number 3.

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